



STATE OF VERMONT
Department of Education
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Standards and Assessment Memorandum

To: Superintendents, Principals, Curriculum Coordinators

From: Elaine Pinckney, Deputy Commissioner of Education
Gail Taylor, Director, Standards and Assessment

Date: March 1, 2006

Re: Local Comprehensive Assessment Guidance

Purpose

Over the past year many people participated in the Vermont School Quality Standards revision process. The revised School Quality Standards became effective on February 9, 2006. The purpose of this letter is to communicate guidance and opportunity associated with the Local Assessment provisions of the School Quality Standards.

Context

In his research on formative assessment, Paul Black defines “assessment” as all those activities undertaken by teachers – and by their students in assessing themselves – which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. (Black, P., & Wiliam, D. 1998). If we accept the premise that learning is driven by what teachers and students do in classrooms, then an assessment system must provide the ongoing diagnostic information that will guide teaching and learning. This premise and the vision of the School Quality Standards support a model that places **classroom assessment at the core of the assessment system**. Common grade, team, school, and state assessments would round out the Local Comprehensive Assessment System.

A Local Comprehensive Assessment System described by the School Quality Standards includes four requirements. The system must:

1. enable decisions to be made about instruction, professional development, and educational resources and curriculum.
2. be consistent with the Vermont Comprehensive Assessment System adopted by the State Board of Education in November 1996, as amended from time to time.
3. align with the Framework (*and Grade Expectations*).
4. employ a balance of classroom-based and school-level assessments.

Guidance

The development and refinement of local assessment systems is a continuous process. As schools move toward the development and implementation of their system, the Department of Education will expect to see milestones of progress along the way. By September 2006, we expect to see the articulation of a vision statement and a draft development plan for the system.

The vision statement will describe the purpose and goals of the local assessment system. It should represent a consensus of the school community and describe a direction that supports a school culture consistent with the goals of the local assessment system. Through the vision statement, the school community communicates its shared values for local assessment.

When completed, the development plan will provide an operational blueprint as the school community implements a local comprehensive assessment system aligned to its vision. The development plan will outline the school's approach to meeting the four local assessment requirements of the School Quality Standards. Questions addressed in the development plan will include the following.

? What process will the school use that will **enable decisions to be made about instruction, professional development, and educational resources and curriculum**? Understanding how assessment information will be used in a meaningful way to improve student learning needs to be an essential part of the development plan. The plan will describe how the local assessment system will provide reliable information about student achievement that is needed to plan curriculum, instruction, and learning. It will also reflect a shared understanding of how the system will respond when assessment information indicates that students are not learning.

? Is the development plan **consistent with the Vermont Comprehensive Assessment System adopted by the State Board of Education in November 1996**?

? What process will the school use to ensure that the components of the local comprehensive assessment system are **aligned with the Vermont Framework and the Grade Expectations**? How will the school ensure that classroom, team, grade, school/district assessments are horizontally coherent, having curriculum, instruction, and assessment all align with the standards, target the same goals for learning, and work together to support students' developing understanding?

? What process will the school employ to develop a **balance of classroom-based and school-based assessments**? The School Quality Standards call for an approach to local assessment that requires moving away from the notion of assessment as judgment toward a vision of assessment as reflection. Formative assessment conducted by teachers in the classroom will provide critical information as teachers develop instructional interventions to improve student learning. Students also share the responsibility for assessment as they reflect on their own learning and monitor their progress through self and peer assessment activities. At the same time, assessments need to be in place that inform programs and student learning across classrooms at the same grade and across different grade levels in the school or district.

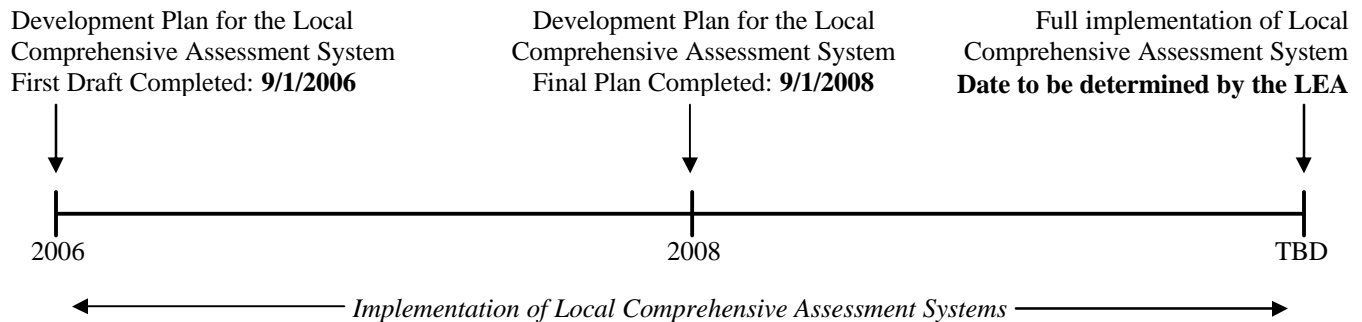
Inherent in these questions are important implications for the professional development of teachers, administrators and other members of the school community. Assessment data management, reporting and communication among students, teachers, parents, administration

and the community at large also needs to be considered as the local comprehensive assessment plan is developed.

It is clear that an effective assessment system that both monitors and informs student learning will need to be planned, resourced, and implemented over time. Understanding that reality, schools will have two years to complete their plan for a system that monitors all content areas indicated in the School Quality Standards. A school should have the beginning of a development plan in place by September 1, 2006. However, the September 2006 version of the plan may include sections that are at a “draft” stage of development. Questions might need to be answered through research, professional development or technical assistance before a school makes a final decision regarding those sections of the plan. The questions will be addressed over the next two years with revisions made to the school plan as needed.

By September 2008, the school development plan will need to address all components and content areas of the Local Comprehensive Assessment System. The actual timeline for the implementation of the school’s system will be decided by the school as long as reasonable progress towards full implementation is outlined in the two year plan and followed during the course of implementation. The graphic below provides a timeline for this process.

Local Comprehensive Assessment System Time Line



The goal of the Department is to provide a coherent, consistent message to the field as schools make important decisions in regards to local assessment. Our own work, providing professional development and technical assistance to schools, will be guided by best assessment practices identified through research.

If you have any questions regarding these guidelines, please contact David White at 828-0154 or at davewhite@education.state.vt.us

Cc: ESA; VPA; VSA; VSBA; VT-NEA